

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY FLASH

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EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS FOR SECRETARY FROM NEWSOM

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PBOR, MOPS, MILL, SY, LE, IS

SUBJECT: FIGHTING IN BEIRUT AREA

1. WE CONVENED URGENT INTERAGENCY MEETING TODAY, WITH REPS FROM NSC, CIA, DOD, NEA, INR AND IO IN ATTENDANCE. OUR CONCLUSION WAS THAT THE U.S.WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER TAKING IMMEDIATE MAJOR INITIATIVE, IN ADDITION TO WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING, TO TRY TO DE-FUSE A PROBLEM WHICH THREATENS TO ESCALATE. WE RECOGNIZE THAT NO APPROACH IS LIKELY TO BE WITHOUT ITS PROBLEMS, BUT OF THOSE CONSIDERED THE GENERAL CONSENSUS FAVORED THE FOLLOWING.

2. THERE WAS A GENERAL CONSENSUS THAT ONE OF THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVES OF ANY OF OUR INITIATIVES SHOULD BE TO GET SYRIAN FORCES OUT OF CHRISTIAN AREAS, IN A FACE-SAVING WAY IF POSSIBLE. THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY COLLECTIVELY IS SO ANGRY AT THE SYRIAN PRESENCE THAT NO SYRIAN SOLDIER IN
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CHRISTIAN AREAS WILL BE SAFE FROM SNIPING OR HARASSMENT FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. THIS SITUATION ONLY INVITES FURTHER SERIES OF PROVOCATIONS AND RETALIATIONS.

3. FIRST, WE PROPOSE APPROACHING URGENTLY AND SIMULTANEOUSLY THE FOUR ARAB TROOP CONTRIBUTORS TO THE ADF--SYRIA, SAUDI ARABIA, SUDAN AND THE UAE--TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING

MAJOR POINTS (WE MIGHT ADD KUWAIT, WHICH WAS A MEMBER OF THE QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE OVERSEEING THE 1976 ARMISTICE; BUT NOT EGYPT, ALSO A MEMBER, BUT STILL IN CONFLICT WITH SYRIA);

-- THE U.S. OBJECTIVES IN LEBANON ARE TO PRESERVE THE COUNTRY'S INDEPENDENCE, SOVEREIGNTY, AND UNITY AND TO FORESTALL PARTITION. BUT WE MUST DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO PREVENT A WIDER CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST FROM ERUPTING AS A RESULT OF PROBLEMS IN LEBANON. THAT DANGER IS NOW VERY REAL. THE BEIRUT FIGHTING, IF NOT STOPPED, COULD LEAD TO GREATER INVOLVEMENT BY ISRAEL. WE HAVE BEEN MAKING MAJOR EFFORTS WITH THE ISRAELIS. WE HAVE BEEN PRESSING THEM TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT AND TO URGE THEIR MARONITE CONTACTS TO HONOR THE CEASEFIRE AND AVOID PROVOCATIONS AND HARASSMENT OF THE SYRIANS IN THE ADF.

-- WE NOW BELIEVE THAT TO RESOLVE THE PRESSING PROBLEM IN BEIRUT--IN THE CONTINUING CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE MARONITE MILITIAS AND THE SYRIAN FORCES IN THE ADF--AN URGENT ASSEMBLY OF THESE FOUR (FIVE, IF KUWAIT IS INCLUDED) GOVERNMENTS AND THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IS REQUIRED TO CONSIDER HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM THROUGH SUCH MEANS AS A NEW CEASEFIRE AND A SEPARATION OF FORCES. WE WOULD SUGGEST TO THESE GOVERNMENTS THAT THEY CONSIDER A COLLECTIVE APPEAL TO OTHER GOVERNMENTS FOR FURTHER HELP
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FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN RESOLVING THE PROBLEM, INCLUDING A POSSIBLE AUGMENTATION OF THE ADF BY TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS ACCEPTABLE TO THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, OR BY THE INTRODUCTION OF OTHER ACCEPTABLE FORCES INTO THE BEIRUT AREA. FYI. WE HAVE DELIBERATELY NOT MENTIONED THE UN BECAUSE SYRIANS MIGHT REGARD MENTION OF IT AS THREAT TO REVIVE OUR EARLIER INITIATIVE TO GO TO SC. GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE SOUTH, WE ALSO BELIEVE MENTION OF UN NOW WOULD HAVE LITTLE CREDIBILITY. IN THIS REGARD, HOWEVER, WE SHOULD STILL KEEP OPEN POSSIBILITY OF WALDHEIM'S RAISING LEVEL OF UN REP IN BEIRUT, SADRUDDIN KHAN MIGHT BE ONE POSSIBILITY.
END FYI.

4. OUR STRATEGY HERE WOULD BE TO IMPRESS UPON THE ARAB STATES THAT THE LEBANESE PROBLEM THREATENS TO SPILL OVER INTO A WIDER ARAB ARENA (THROUGH ISRAELI INTERVENTION) AND WE NEED THEM TO BEGIN DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM SO THAT WE IN TURN CAN CONVINCE THE ISRAELIS THAT PRACTICAL NEW EFFORTS ARE UNDER WAY.

5. IN SUCH AN APPROACH TO THE ARAB STATES ON LEBANON, WE

WOULD ALSO TRY TO PUT ACROSS CONVINCINGLY AND CREDIBLY

THAT THE U.S. STILL CONSIDERS THAT THE SYRIANS HAD PLAYED A GENERALLY CONSTRUCTIVE AND OFTEN INDISPENSABLE ROLE IN TRYING TO MAINTAIN PEACE AND SECURITY IN LEBANON AND THAT THE U.S. HAS MADE REPEATED AND FIRM EFFORTS WITH THE ISRAELIS, NOT ONLY TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT, BUT ALSO TO STOP SENDING MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO THE MARONITE FORCES OF A KIND AND IN A WAY WHICH ENCOURAGES THESE FORCES TO PROLONG THE FIGHTING AND TO PROVOKE THE ADF.

6. WE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS PROPOSED COURSE OF ACTION OR ON ANY OTHER OPTIONS AND INITIATIVES YOU MIGHT WISH TO TRY.

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7. THE POSSIBILITIES CONSIDERED BUT NOT PROPOSED AT THIS TIME INCLUDE:

A. AN OFFER OF U.S. GOOD OFFICES, POSSIBLY BY SENDING A PROMINENT AMERICAN TO THE AREA FOR CONSULTATIONS;

B. DIRECT APPROACHES TO THE LEBANESE AND SYRIAN LEADERS FOR A SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL OF THEIR FORCES FROM BEIRUT PROPER. WE HAVE ONE REPORT (BEIRUT 4520 BEING REPEATED) THAT THE SYRIANS MIGHT HAVE BEEN READY TO WITHDRAW THEIR FORCES FROM BEIRUT PROPER AND EMPLACE THEM IN THE HILLS SURROUNDING THE CITY, WHILE LEBANESE ARMY TOOK OVER SECURITY FUNCTIONS. BOUTROS ALLEGEDLY TURNED DOWN THIS IDEA ON THE BASIS THAT THE MARONITE MILITIAS AND THE PALESTINIANS WOULD MOVE TO AN INSTANT ALL-OUT CLASH. OUR INITIAL VIEW IS THAT MARONITE-PALESTINIAN CLASHES WOULD PROBABLY OCCUR SOONER OR LATER IF THE SYRIAN FORCES WITHDREW FROM BEIRUT, BUT THAT THERE MIGHT BE AN ADEQUATE BREATHING SPELL DURING WHICH WE COULD TRY TO DEAL WITH THIS DANGER. A SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL--AT THE LEAST--WOULD REDUCE THE RISKS OF ISRAELI MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SUPPORT OF THE CHRISTIANS.

UNDER THIS OPTION, THEREFORE, WE WOULD URGE THE LEBANESE AND SYRIAN GOVERNMENTS TO CARRY OUT SUCH A WITHDRAWAL IN ORDER TO GAIN EVERYONE A RESPITE FROM THE MOST IMMEDIATE DANGERS, REPLACING THEM WITH LEBANESE POLICE AND ARMY UNITS. WE WOULD DEVISE WITH THE SYRIANS FACE-SAVING WAYS THIS MIGHT OCCUR.

8. URQUHART HAS RAISED POSSIBILITY OF YOU GOING TO DAMASCUS FOLLOWING YOUR TALKS IN ALEXANDRIA, SAYING THAT

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BY VIRTUE OF YOUR MEETINGS WITH THE ISRAELIS ON THE
LEBANON PROBLEM YOU WOULD HAVE SPECIAL ENTREE. SINCE WE
HAVE LITTLE SPECIFIC TO PROPOSE AT THIS TIME AND BECAUSE
OF THE NEED FOR YOU TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON TO REPORT TO

THE PRESIDENT, WE HAVE NOT RPT NOT ENCOURAGED THIS
THOUGHT. CHRISTOPHER

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